Performing Community:
Networked Poetics and the Malawian Public Sphere

A talk by Susanna Sacks, Northwestern University

Throughout southeastern Africa, poetry has historically been used to demarcate communities and claim political power. In the 21st century, poets have turned to social media to publish their works and develop networks. These platforms are reshaping all public communication: hospitals in Malawi use WhatsApp to ease communication difficulties; politicians in Zimbabwe campaign on Twitter; activists in South Africa use Facebook to plan protests. In each case, the networked public sphere inaugurated through digital communication expands the geographic bounds of national discourse and creates heightened interactivity between producer and consumer.

By focusing on political poetry from Malawi, this talk considers how arts communities in a single nation are shaped by transnational discourses and networks, especially through social media publication. Attending to the formal, media, and performance context of new poetry from Malawi, this talk shows that poets develop on transnational and local forms affiliated with political activism to develop alternative means of community organizing.

Tuesday September 18, 4:00 pm
Seigle Hall L004

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